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FM AMEMBASSY MANAMA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8516

INFO RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RHBVAKS/COMUSNAVCENT PRIORITY

RHMFIS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

S E C R E T MANAMA 000141

SIPDIS

BAGHDAD FOR AMBASSADOR ERELI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/10/2039

TAGS: PREL MARR AF AEC IR MO BA

SUBJECT: BAHRAIN: KING ON REGIONAL SECURITY, IRAN,
AFGHANISTAN AND PIRACY

REF: MANAMA 117

Classified By: CDA Christopher Henzel for reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S) Summary: King Hamad encouraged the U.S. military to base P-3s in Bahrain, asked that GCC governments be kept in the loop on any U.S.-Iranian engagement, and commented on Morocco's dispute with Iran. He reiterated offers of help in Afghanistan and with anti-piracy efforts. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) King Hamad received NAVCENT and Fifth Fleet commander Vice Admiral Bill Gortney and CDA March 8 at Safriya Palace. Also joining the audience were Royal Court Minister Khalid bin Ahmad, Minister of State for Defense Muhammad bin Abdullah, and CDR Benjamin Snell, USN.

¶3. (S) The King, as jovial as he usually is with U.S. visitors, spent an hour updating Admiral Gortney on his recent meetings with Arab leaders, his March 2 meeting with Secretary Clinton in Sharm al-Sheikh, and a March 3 phone conversation with Secretary Gates.

¶4. (S) King Hamad had told Secretaries Clinton and Gates that Bahrain was interested in deploying police in support of coalition efforts in Afghanistan, and naval assets in support of NAVCENT's anti-piracy efforts off Somalia. VADM Gortney and CDA welcomed both offers and said the USG would be in touch with the GOB for further discussions.

¶5. (S) The King expressed repeated appreciation for the U.S. military presence in Bahrain. He was ready to positively consider U.S. requests for new access. The King said he understood Navy P-3s currently based in Qatar may need more flexibility and urged that they "reQrn to Bahrain." (Note: The U.S. military moved P-3s from Bahrain to Qatar and Oman several years ago for logistical reasons. End note.) Admiral Gortney welcomed the King's offer.

¶6. (S) King Hamad was clearly happy with the Admiral's report that NAVCENT and the GOB were making progress toward deepening the channel off Hidd in order to make possible the pier-side visit of a U.S. aircraft carrier. The King also stated he was reserving land next to NAVCENT Headquarters in Jufair should the U.S. Navy request it for the possible expansion of the base.

¶7. (S) The King said he told Secretary Clinton that Bahrain and other GCC governments welcomed U.S. efforts to engage with Iran, but if regional issues were discussed, "we should know." He urged that the USG keep the UAE's three islands on the agenda of any talks with the Iranians. He suspected some Arab leaders might imagine an Israeli strike could make the Iranian nuclear file "go away," but Bahrain knew this was not a realistic scenario, and therefore international efforts to find a negotiated solution were essential. The King was proud at the way so many Arab governments - and the U.S. - had

expressed support for Bahrain in its recent dispute with Iran (reftel), noting that Morocco had recently broken relations with Iran chiefly because the Iranian Ambassador in Rabat "was up to nonsense;" the Iranian comments about Bahrain had been the last straw for the GOM.

¶8. (S) Comment: Bahrain's Foreign Minister pronounced his country's public dispute with Iran over on February 25 after the Iranian Interior Minister paid a fence-mending visit; the FM made his own visit to Tehran February 26. However, the Bahraini leadership's private suspicion of the Iranians is clearly as deep as ever.

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